Isn't the Water Supposed to be Outside the Ship?

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"Any man who may be asked in this century what he did to make his life worthwhile, I think can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction, "I served in the United States Navy.'" – John F. Kennedy, August 1963.

INTRODUCTION

My mother saved many of the letters I wrote home during my service in the United States Navy. Rereading them, the ones from March 1969 through February 1970 brought back many memories. Even more interesting was being able to trace my own ups and downs as I got a crash course in "Maturity and Responsibility 101," a subject no college or university can ever teach you.

For nine months I was part of the crew of the USS *Hanson* (DD 832), including five while she fought in the service of the United States in the Vietnam War. It was a privilege, but not altogether an enjoyable one simply because I was far from home in the company of strangers (at first) degrees of intelligence, personality, and principles vastly different from my own. But as Al Gore said "*E Pluribus Unum – "From one, many"* (sic).

RALLYING AROUND THE FLAG

In January 1969, I was attending the University of Maryland, wasting my time and my family's money. Classes were filled to overflowing with male students desperately looking for "gut courses" that would provide a high enough grade average to let them keep the coveted II-S (student deferment) draft classification.

One day in such a class (appropriately enough East Asian History) I knew "That's all I can stands, I can't stands no more."[1] I went to the administration building and dropped out of school and then drove a few miles down U.S. Route 1 to Hyattsville and enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

I decided to join the navy because warships always fascinated me. My father was a World War II navy veteran who served on the USS *Wyoming* AG-17 (ex BB 32), "the Chesapeake Raider," and I loved listening to his interesting and humorous stories.

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[1] Popeye the Sailor, in numerous cartoons.

I went to Hyattsville, MD and met Chief Electrician's Mate E. Simmons, USN. It was just after 1 PM and that good gentleman was returning from lunch. After some perfunctory basic intelligence tests, I was enrolled in the United States Naval Reserve. This was a temporary measure to save me for the Navy since a reservist could not be drafted by another branch. Three months later I was discharged and reenlisted in the regular United States Navy for 4 years active service and two years of inactive reserve service. ("Inactive reserve" was a redundant term because, between 1973 and 1987, most reserve service was inactive in nature.) Because I had 60 college credits; I was enlisted as a seaman (E-3), two grades higher than normal -- a promotion for simply enlisting. Things were already looking up!

On March 20, 1969, many others and I entered the service of the United States at Fort Holabird (long since razed to the ground and the site "developed") in Baltimore, Maryland. We got a physical exam, watched the world's slowest civil servant[2] type our papers in a desultory manner, and then took an oath to defend the United States and its Constitution against all foreign and domestic enemies; the latter group to me includes liberal Democrats.

The oath was administered in the "swearing-in room" by a Marine captain. He was probably about five feet eight or nine inches tall, but definitely looked able to handle all enemies, foreign or domestic, he might encounter. We were given a final opportunity to change our minds and leave if we wanted. However, since there were about 150 of us packed into a room meant to hold about half that many, and I was farthest from the door, escape was impossible. Actually, I don't think anyone, even me, even tried.

Then, back to watch the fair young woman practice typing and coffee drinking some more and presto! A mere 12 hours after processing began I was off to Friendship International Airport (now Baltimore Washington International) for a flight to the Great Lakes United States Recruit Training Center near Chicago, IL.

As a seaman, I was placed in charge of the small group on that flight. I had no idea what this entailed except there were ominous threats that I was "responsible" for the safe arrival of the group. We all made it. On my first military mission, I commanded (even if the rest of the

[2] I still remember her name: Carol Piekarski. I stared at it on her desk nameplate long enough.

command was blissfully ignorant of it) and successfully accomplished the objective. Could even John Paul Jones say as much?

Reporting For Duty

We finally arrived at the U.S. Navy's Great Lakes Recruit Training Center at 0300 (3 a.m. to normal people) on 21 March 1969. There, grizzled veterans who had been in the Navy two weeks longer than we had showed us to our bunks (a.k.a. "racks"). These were metal frame affairs with dirty rolled mattresses and equally foul pillows.

To make this affair comfortable, we were issued bedding by the naval equivalent of a concierge, the barrack "master-at-arms," who looked delighted to be awakened at 2 AM to perform this humanitarian service. This was the first time I signed for custody of U.S. Navy property. Later I would sign for codebooks, ship's issue clothing, and the bridge navigation equipment of an entire destroyer, the *USS Sarsfield (DD-837)*, the second of three ships I served aboard. On the morning 21 March 1969, however, the navy introduced me, gingerly, to the "signing for" process -- with some raunchy linen and one bedraggled blanket!

After getting settled, our old salt duennas left us with these words: "The head (Navy talk for the potty) is down the passageway (more Navy lingo for a hallway). But if they catch two of you in there at the same time after taps, they'll think you're homos and discharge ya!" Many a man did prodigious jobs of bladder control that night long ago, before Bill Clinton and "Don't ask, don't tell," I assure you! So I embarked on my naval career as a member of Company 201, Battalion 23, 2 Regiment at the Naval Training Center, Great Lakes, IL. 60088 on 24 March 1969.

26 March 1969 (Wednesday) -- *Stuck in a holding company. But it will only be a day or two and I should get out of boot camp in late May. We were overflow and they had to put about 30 of us in this grim place. I got my uniform today. And it snowed about four inches. I came through my physical exam okay and am fine.*

A LESSON IN VOLUNTEERISM

While in the holding company, I got my first practical demonstration of the logic behind the precept "Never volunteer!" One bright morning, as the RTC lay blanketed in freshly fallen snow, a petty officer came into the barrack and announced he had various "working parties" and wanted volunteers. He rattled off the choice jobs, e.g., shoveling snow at the Commanding Officer's house and other ripe plums. The company got smaller as the volunteers left for their jobs.

Gradually only a score or so of us were left. For some perverse reason I decided I would not voluntarily go anywhere; obey an order, of course, but not volunteer! One more pearl was thrown before us swine and our little band diminished to about 15 diehards. Only one working party was left and the possible dire consequences of not volunteering for this one were strongly hinted at. Ten of our number caved in and were marched off.

Finally, our blustering tormentor, when the others were well away, gave *we few, we happy few, we band of bothers*, a scowl and departed, leaving us non-volunteers to wile away the morning with such diversions as were available to us -- napping, shining shoes, or thinking about just how many days there are in four years (1461)!

By 29 March 1969 things were hectic. We were in a new barracks building and I if didn't make too many mistakes I would graduate in eight weeks.

Our new home was a long, narrow, L-shaped affair with a tile floor, and cinder block walls. At one end were the company commander's office, the "head," and the showers. At the horizontal portion of the L was a lounge with a RC Cola machine and ashtrays. Such recreation as we were offered consisted of "smoke and coke" (the cola kind) breaks.

A row of double bunks ran the length of each side. In between the bunks were stainless steel lockers, also two high. Each locker was largely open-fronted but did have a locking drawer

for valuables (except that we didn't have any then) secured by a genuine Navy issue Master™ combination lock. Mine, after surviving war and travel across three oceans, was broken when my shipboard locker was burglarized during a 2-week reserve duty stint aboard the USS *Sanctuary* [AH-17] five years later.

Company 201 was lined up in two rows in front of our racks (beds), each row about six feet apart and facing the other. We comrades were introduced to each other thusly. "Look right, look left. Both of those men next to you are ***Thieves***!" Brian Donlevy, the sadistic Sergeant Markoff in the movie *Beau Geste*, couldn't have done it any better!

The decor of our mercifully temporary home was patterned on Alcatraz, but with a less homey and open flavor and was probably purposely made austere so the when we got to a ship, any ship, we would find the living quarters an improvement. Wall decorations consisted of posters illustrating the armed forces "Code of Conduct" and the "watch quarter and station bill," a sort of duty assignments roster.

On 2 April 1969 I qualified as a third class swimmer by deceit and trickery (or ingenuity – depends on your point of view, I guess) and some poor sod went nuts and started slashing up his arms with a knife. Now, it was on this wise that I outsmarted the Navy and earned the rank of third class swimmer. The importance of swimming to the Navy is obvious, but is set forth for those slow on the uptake by the following quotation from my copy of our souvenir book, the *Keel*:

> *Swimming and survival at sea are highly important parts in the training curriculum. The recruit may enter training as a qualified lifeguard or as a non-swimmer, but all leave equipped in the methods of sea survival in order to ensure that they have the maximum protection against the potential perils of the sea. Special emphasis is placed on fundamental swimming strokes, survival at sea procedures, and flotation drills.*

Our swimming test was quite an event. We were marched en masse to a big indoor swimming pool and in our official USN swimming trunks (issue swimwear came in two colors, blue or tan, and distribution was completely random). Upon arrival, some jovial fellows asked if

any of us couldn't swim. The way the question was put aroused my suspicion and I wisely refrained from answering.

Those who admitted they couldn't swim were separated from the herd and harangued about the importance of swimming skills and the consequences if they could not learn them. The non-swimmers would take night swimming classes and would not leave boot camp until they could slice through the water like a human flotilla of Johnny Weismullers. I, a non-swimmer, was deeply worried.

I debated turning myself in, but then the technique used to administer the swimming test dawned on me. We were simply to be ordered into the pool and told to swim around its sides. In numbers sometimes truly lies salvation. A desperate plan formed in my mind and I determined to risk all and try it.

I kept silent about my lack of aquatic manual self-transportation ability and remained apart from the Pariah non-swimmers who were standing in a corner of the building like a flock of sheep marked for the slaughter. Upon command, a couple of hundred others and I leaped into the water. Arms and legs thrashed, water flew, and I maneuvered to the edge of the pool and pulled myself around its entire length. In that maelstrom of flailing humanity the instructors couldn't tell who was swimming and who wasn't – they probably didn't care. My plan succeeded and I was rewarded with the appellation of "third class swimmer." I felt that even if my ability didn't warrant the title, my daring and ingenuity did; after all, does the United States Navy encourage not these qualities?

Lest you condemn me as a cheat, let me hastened to add that while enlisting, I told my recruiter that I could not swim. He smiled and said that was okay, because if the ship, burning and exploding sank 1200 miles from land surrounded by pools of flaming oil, being able to swim wouldn't really help me much.

I don't know what happened to fellow who cut up his wrists, somewhat too lightly as it turned out to be considered a genuine suicide attempt. People who did things like this were removed from our midst – whether they could swim or not. They were labeled as having things like "passive dependent personalities" and given a general discharge. But some, I now suspect, were commissioned as officers.

We got our scores back from the Navy Aptitude tests on 5 April 1969. Most of my scores were average, some even a little above. We started classroom instruction - first aid, dental care, and stuff like that. We couldn't wear watches so I didn't even know the time of the day usually. Often I was not even sure what day of the week it is.

They are right fond of yelling and screaming up there. I guess it's just to toughen us up but still...oh well. I like the Navy a lot but I sure will be glad to get out of boot camp. Seven weeks to go.

We have a big inspection coming up Monday. I'm always afraid I'll get set back in training or something. I don't know. I try my best and so far I seem to be making it. Most of us up here would sell our souls to be home for just one day but I got hand it to the Navy, they are making sailors out of us. Guys wake up in the middle of the night and jump to attention or sing out in their sleep "Forward compartment watch reporting, Sir!" I'm not sorry I joined the Navy, I'm proud to be in it but I sure will be glad to get out of boot camp. (I must be cracking up, I'm repeating myself.)

I'm supposed to tell you, if you need me home for some reason, like serious illness in the family, call the nearest Red Cross office to arrange an emergency leave. I sure hope you never have to.

On or about 9 April 1969, we were interviewed for A-school assignments. I had been recommended for radarman, quartermaster, torpedoman, and gunners mate technician. The last one involved working with nuclear weapons. The school assignment interviews were screenings to determine who would go on to specialty training after boot camp. Each man was allowed five choices for specialty or "rate" training. Some poor devils went right to the fleet from boot camp for what was euphemistically called on the job training. This usually meant assignment to unskilled positions in the deck force (painting, lookout watches, etc.) or to an engineering division (working down in the engine room or fire room in balmy temperatures on the order of 120˚F). The deck force was called "deck apes" the engineers were "snipes."

Being selected for a further training however was no guarantee of a cushy life either. Our company commander warned us that under no circumstances should we allow the interviewer to

note hospital corpsman as one of our choices. This, he stated, was tantamount to service with the Marines in a rice paddy since the Navy furnished the Marines with medics.

14 April 1969 was a rotten day. I just can't seem to do anything right. I didn't salute an officer and got yelled at for that. I broke a glass in the mess hall and had to sweep it up and finally I dropped my rifle and have to sleep with it tonight. Some days you just can't win. I'm glad today is the exception rather than the rule.

I also had a perpetual cold but so did everyone else. Years later, Navy medical research would identify this mystery ailment as bronchitis and discover that asking its sufferers "You ain't dead yet, are you, you can wait until morning right?" is not effective in its treatment. Neither was giving the sufferer two aspirins and a bottle of cough medicine a sure cure. It took me a year to get over it my bout of Great Lakesitis.

11 April 1969 and we got blue uniforms, so I'm now wearing my jumper with the flap on back, 13 button pants and the whole bit. I was turned down for a chance at Annapolis because my eyes are so bad without glasses.[3] *I met all the other qualifications.*

I'm feeling a lot better now but I'm weak, yesterday we ran the obstacle course and I couldn't make it over a wall I jumped so easily a week ago.

I spent Thursday afternoon planting flowers in front of the CPO's (Chief Petty Officer) barracks. It's right across from the brig and the big threat around here is they'll turn you over to the Marines.

On 16 April 1969 we had swim survival class, which was a lot of fun. We were in contention for the star flag that week. That meant we excelled in the manly arts of clothes washing, housekeeping, etc. That Friday I had been in the Navy one month.

18 April 1969 We got our graduation date moved up a week. We graduated May 16. Somebody stole one of my notebooks yesterday. It had two days of notes in it and we have a test

[3] Obviously the screeners were unaware the Lord Horatio Nelson was blind in one eye and he wasn't bad as a naval officer.

in about in about a week. All the information is in my Blue Jackets Manual so was no big loss. I was just mad because I can't see what use it would be to anyone except me.

We are going to change to whites soon. I don't particularly want to because they get dirty so easily and we will be washing them every night.

Most of the people up here are okay but about a dozen in the company are duds. One in particular maddened me. I hoped he'd fail his first test and get held back. Being held back in training was, in my opinion, the greatest calamity that could befall one. It meant repeating a certain number of weeks of training. Some members of my company were in the graduation pictures of 3 or 4 companies that had preceded ours. Stories circulated, probably not true, of one individual who did 20 years in boot camp and was retired from the Navy with a pension. It was said he had not left the Great Lakes Recruit Training Center since 1949.

21 April 1969 -- We got shots today. They use a gun and say it doesn't hurt. It doesn't for about 3 hours then watch out. My cold and sore throat came back. It's unbelievably damp and windy here. Less than four weeks left. We have finally started advanced training. Another guy went over the hill.

23 April 1969 -- I lost my recreation hall (and phone) pass because my shoes weren't shiny enough at inspection.

I got a 3.26 out of 4.0 on my test today. That was fourth highest in the company. We might get intelligence flag because our average score is highest in the battalion. Our GCT (learning ability test) is also the battalion high average.

I went over to sickbay. They gave me some aspirin, cough medicine, and junk. I'm feeling right good now. We get to march in an Armed Forces Day parade on the 17th of May in Chicago. That's the day after we graduate. I found out I'm being paid as a full seaman instead of a SR (seaman recruit). So besides an extra stripe I get a wad of money. I think I'm losing weight. I probably don't weight over 170 now.

28 April 1969 -- We started "service week" last Friday. We take a break in training and they put us to work. Some guys get really soft, easy jobs most go to the galley. I'm sort of in

between. I'm over at the Fire Fighting Training Unit. It's oily and dirty but not hard work and the hours are comparatively short.

One of the company commanders was put on report for striking a recruit. Our company commander wasn't like that he was with the majority that demanded discipline but they didn't stand for downright brutality.

Since we started service week I've got hordes of free time (comparatively speaking that is). I'm so full of RC Cola I can't look another can in the face.

There's a movie tonight but we can't go. I'm more than a little disappointed because I sure would like to see a movie not about damage control, naval history, what to do if you become a POW, etc.

I went over to sickbay a few days ago around 800 am. I had a 99˚ temperature and red throat so I got some cough medicine and aspirin.

Service week was an assignment to "real Navy duty" for five working days. The majority of my company went to slave in the galley (not an oar-propelled warship, the mess hall). Others got soft go-fer jobs at headquarters. I was dropped in a special hell - the fire fighting school.

My assignments as dogsbody-under-instruction were laying out equipment, pouring fresh oil and gas into the tanks and ship mockups that were set ablaze for the recruits to extinguish, and such jobs as the chief who ran the school might think up. Fortunately he was not a deep thinker, although I was forced to listen to country music (no doubt his way of training me to resist torture if captured one day by the commies).

The chief was a real piece of work. If there were no U.S. Navy, he probably would have spent his life as a junior assistant road repair crew flagman, a glass sorter in a recycling plant, or the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He and I mixed as well as oil and water.

One day, after the trainees had left, a poor gopher made the mistake of showing itself on the lawn of the school's administration-and-classroom building. My leader ran inside and returned armed with a .22 caliber revolver, yelling at me to "come on!" The bullets flew and soon the harmless and unarmed gopher was mortally wounded. The Chief, knowing that gophers

sometimes charge when they are wounded, dispatched the dangerous creature by firing six more shots into it as it lay dying. My contribution to the chase was to run around behind (always behind!) my blood crazed superior and pray the gopher would escape. This was my first combat experience in the armed forces of the United States and on this one occasion, my sympathies were with the foe.

May 3, 1969 - I got out of that crummy fire fighting school on Friday. I had to throw away a white hat, it just wouldn't wash out, and my hands are still dirty.

We have our pictures taken Monday. We also are going to be asked to "volunteer" to donate blood. It's for Marines in Viet Nam so did of course – they didn't even have to threaten me.

I might get Liberty on the 10th. I guess I will go to Chicago. I got my first paycheck for $20. Not a lot, but a start.

As I alluded to earlier, one thing most enlisted men in the service do is count days. There are 1461 in a four-year enlistment. Most toilet stalls I had occasion to visit in Navy buildings had among their scrawled graffiti, messages like "892 DTG" (days to go).

5 May 1969 -- We had pictures taken, color portraits, company pictures and yearbook pictures. We gave blood, it wasn't so bad, and I didn't even feel weak.

I get Liberty on May 11. I guess I'll go to Chicago. They have a lot of parks and museums.

I finally got rid of my sore throats, colds, and junk like that. I even got to see a movie on Saturday.

I've got an important test Thursday that I had better not fail. You only have to answer 1/2 the questions to pass. I passed with flying colors. Boot Camp, after a few more bumps in the road was behind me.

WAR, HUH, GOOD GAWD Y'ALL!

After 10 weeks of boot training, six weeks of training at Newport, RI in the quartermaster rating, and another six weeks selling donuts to officers at the Fleet Training Center in Newport when I wasn't swabbing and waxing decks, I was awarded the training completion certificate below assigned to the USS *Hanson*, DD-832.

The United States Ship *Hanson* was a Gearing class destroyer built by Bath Ironworks, Bath, Maine, during the big one - WWII. She was launched on March 11, 1945 and completed exactly two months later.

Figure 1. The USS Hanson circa 1969

In the early 1960s she was subjected to the Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization Program (FRAM). The major effects of this were reducing her speed, making her top heavy, and marring her once sleek and balance appearance.

Hanson and I met on September 13, 1969. She displaced 2425 tons standard and 3480 tons fully loaded (i.e., with fuel, food, ammunition, fresh water, and me). She was 390.5 feet long (overall) and had a beam of 40.9 feet. Her draft was 19 feet; because of the large sonar dome below the waterline at the bow. I was 6 feet 2 inches long and displaced 162 pounds.

Her weaponry was four 5-inch 38-caliber dual-purpose guns in two twin mounts (The caliber is the length of the gun times its bore so a 5"/38 gun is 15.83 feet long. "Dual purpose"

hopefully implied that these guns could be used against aircraft as well as surface targets. That may have been the case in 1945, but certainly not in jet age of 1969. Planes could simply fly faster across the sky than the guns could be trained to aim at them, a fact I observed more than once.

The guns however, were terminal against people, and useful against bunkers, sampans, buildings, and other targets of the kind common in Vietnam. So when new ships were being built with one gun and missiles, the old *Hanson* and some of her even older multi-gun equipped sisters were vigorously employed in Southeast Asia.

For attacking submarines, of which there were none then and are still none today in the People's Republic of Vietnam Navy, *Hanson* had an Antisubmarine Rocket (ASROC) launcher that fired a rocket-booster equipped antisubmarine torpedo into the air and several miles from the ship where it parachuted into the water to destroy its target (if all went well). Two triple Mark 32 antisubmarine warfare torpedo tube mounts were mounted forward.

Hanson's engines developed 60,000 shaft horsepower to turn twin screws. The result, in her prime, was a top speed of 34 knots. She was past her prime, though, and carrying extra weight like an aging and out-of-shape track star. Her top speed was about 28 knots in 1969.

Her crew had close to 270 officers and enlisted men. One of the heavier burdens I bore was the knowledge that if all the officers, petty officers, and most of the other enlisted men were killed in battle, command of the ship would fall to me; I stood ready!

The ship's motto "All Seas" was very apt because no doubt all the seawater in the world flowed under, washed over, or passed through her at one time or another. She was very clean, however, and the baker made the world's best cinnamon rolls.

The *Hanson* sails on today (1993), as the Taiwanese navy's *Liao Yang*; hull number DDG 921. She was transferred to The Republic of China on April 18, 1973. The Spanish Navy had refused to accept her because they claimed she was in too poor a condition and at the time they were probably right. Since then, the *Liao Yang* has been completely rearmed and modernized. Forty-seven years after her completion, she is still sailing on.[4] So am I.

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[4] *On 1 June, 2004 Taiwan decommissioned her for the last time. I'm a slow writer!*

Figure 2. USS Hanson, aka Liao Yang.

Catching Up with My Ship that has Left Without Me

The *Hanson* had left for one of her many trips to the war before I was quite ready to go. Therefore I flew to Travis Air Force Base in San Francisco. From there in was by charter airline to Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines, via Anchorage AL and Atsugi Air Base in Tokyo, Japan.

Never was there a more inexperienced guppy than I as I made that trip. While sitting in the departure lounge at Travis, I heard the page "All Navy E-3 and below report to the travel desk." Unsuspecting fool that I was, I did.

Once there I was introduced to a Mrs. Somebody (no disrespect, I can't remember her name) and her three children. She was going to join her husband at Clark AFB in the P. I. and I was to be her baby sitter for the next 9000 miles. Two of the kids were okay. The third little monster, while mom was asleep, would occasionally look at me and say "My daddy's in the Air Force, I hate the Navy!" This repeated declaration was followed by a kick to my shin. Thereafter, the first time serving as a warning, I was able to dodge the physical attack, but was forced to endure randomly timed slurs about the naval service. I was beginning to agree with many of them about eight hours into the trip.

At the first stop, in Anchorage, I run to the bar and had the first drink of my life, a double scotch and soda. It helped and I bought a foldout packet of postcards of Alaska. All I saw of Alaska was a dark airport lounge.

September 10, 1969 -- I'm stuck in Subic Bay right now at the receiving station. We might get out tomorrow to go to the ship.

So far I've been to Anchorage, Alaska & Tokyo, Japan. I was alright but the receiving station was a dump. The word, which I believe to this day, was that it was built on the site of a Japanese WWII prison camp. I'll be glad to get to the ship. I'm unloading the mail truck right now. We unloaded 19,800 lbs. of junk today. The "junk" consisted, among other things, of boxes marked "Medical Supplies, Fragile." I picked up each box, walked back to the loading-dock and placed it carefully on a stack of other boxes. I was interrupted in my labors as I picked up another box in the truck by the shouts of a petty officer first class who informed me "we don't have all expletive day!" He demonstrated a more efficient method, from a speed point of view, by grabbing the box I had just picked up and tossing it on to the loading-dock. He then ordered me to implement his method. Closing my ears to noises that sounded an awful lot like breaking glass, I obeyed.

On the night of September 12, 1969 and we were notified of our departure for the war in typical Navy fashion. The transit barrack people including me were watching a movie about when around 2000 they stopped the flick and told us to be ready to leave in 20 minutes. We were driven to the Naval Air station and thrown aboard a "C-2", a twin-engine cargo plane.

As we boarded we were given inflatable lifejackets and told, "When we crash, evacuate the aircraft in order of rank." "Yeah, right," I thought, "I'm an E-3 in an airplane full of officers and senior enlisted men and if something happens it's every man for himself!"

The interior of that airplane had no windows and was completely padded - floor, walls and ceiling. In short it was like a big flying coffin. Sometimes, that is exactly what it turned out to be.

The chief petty officer in the seat next to me was obviously drunk. He talked briefly to me, explaining that he had made these flights before and that now he always got drunk before he'd make one.

13 September 1969 - quite a day today. Landed on the USS Hancock (CVA-19) at 3:30 am and at noon I was taken to the Hanson by helicopter and lowered about 120 feet on a sling. The told me to put it under my shoulders and hold on. I asked, "Is this all?" The air crewman said yes so I jumped out of the helicopter. The view dangling over a racing destroyer was beautiful. The ship looked like a model racing through a brilliant blue-green ocean (the bow wake and stern wash were magnificent). The sun was shining. I should also note I was wearing a life jacket. If I had fallen, and if I missed the ship and didn't get puréed by the screws, I guess it would have been helpful. The new captain[5] of the ship and four others were with me. My new address was:

U.S.S. Hanson DD 832
OAN Division
FPO San Francisco, Calif 96601.

I hadn't slept in 24 hours. My rack (bunk) was in the 1st or Deck Division compartment, There was no locker for me then so I had to live out of my sea bag. My sea bag would get moved from time to time by a gang of gnomes known as the "compartment cleaners" without my knowledge and I'd have to hunt down my bag or worldly goods. After a few days of this ransom torment, I got a locker.

[5] Richard J. Fleeson, Captain of the *Hanson* from Sept. 1969 to July 1971, passed away in September 2002.

OAN Division[6]

OAN represents one of the most diversified divisions on board the HANSON. Unity through diversity is not their motto, however, for each person in every facet of the division is proud to be "such a valuable member of the ship's company." On the surface the ship's office would appear to be one unified section. Upon closer examination, though, one finds that two ratings are present here: yeoman, the men who maintain the ship's paperwork, and the personnel men, or the men who maintain the ship's service records. Although they seldom get along, together they modestly claim to be the Hub of the ship and responsible only to the Executive Officer. The postal clerks, on the other hand, assert that unless the mail is delivered the crew's morale would be so low that effective work would be impaired. Therefore, they are the Hub. Of course, the chief corpsman states that without him everyone would be too sick to work. Hence he is the Hub. The quartermasters make no such extravagant claims, but do quietly admit that the ship would never find its way across the ill-charted seas without their "expert navigation." Throughout the deployment this, the administrative division of the ship, functioned in an admirable if not outstanding manner (sic). Their record speaks for itself - a job well done.

It was now 16 September 1969 and so far I've seen flying fish, Russian trawlers, and got a pay raise of $65 a month sea and combat pay. We sailed around with the Hancock. It's far from dangerous compared to hiking through a rice paddy. I got an upper bunk that has a steam line about two-inches over my feet. My watch schedule was from 0000-0400and 1200-1600 each day. All I did was sleep, eat, work, and stand watch and not much of the first one.

On 20 September 1969 we traded chasing aircraft carriers for direct combat missions as we arrived off the coast of Vietnam to do gunfire support. We blew up an ammo bunker and were credited with having killed four VC. Sometimes you heard artillery ashore and at night there were also star shells popping off everywhere.

We ran over a fishnet yesterday. It was a shame because these people used the net to make their living, such as it was. They just stood up in their boat shaking their fists as we sailed by. If they weren't Viet Cong that morning, they probably were that night.

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[6] *Hanson Western Pacific Cruise Book, 1970, The Allen Company, Anaheim, CA.*

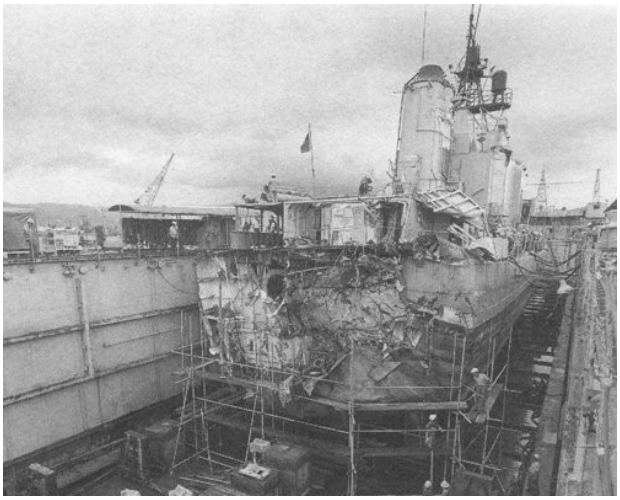
As the junior QM, I was given the mundane job of making the traditional “12 o’clock report" to the captain just before noon every day. My ritualistic report always gave the officer of the deck’s respects and asked for permission “to strike eight bells on time" to signify 12 Noon.

I soon noticed my speech, which I delivered in the wardroom as the officers ate, always interrupted the captain’s lunch. One morning I finished my speech as the captain listened, fork in hand and caught in mid-bite. I decided to apologize for always disrupting his midday meal. “Captain,” I said, “I’m sorry to bother you every day, but they say I have to do this." Dead silence filled the wardroom as the other officers gaped -- no doubt waiting to see if I would be keelhauled or merely made to walk the plank. The Captain managed to swallow his food then burst out laughing. "That's okay, son," he said, "we all have our jobs to do on this ship. Permission granted!" ”Yes, sir!" I answered. Then, following naval tradition, I went off to strike eight bells on time.

That's me in the middle, round about October 1969, during an underway replenishment. The late Captain R. J. Fleeson, whose lunch I always interrupted, is on the phone with someone on the tanker.

Well, I was at least having an interesting time, I must say. Quartermastering seemed hard stuff but I was trying my best. I was learning that trying one’s best, while it may not make one the best, keeps one from being the worst.

After a few days on the gun-line, our official score was eight enemy troops killed for sure and some of bunkers -- 4 destroyed and 4 damaged. I was exhausted, and we headed back for good old Subic Bay, PI. I don't think the former (my condition) had anything to do with the latter (our returning to port) but who knows, after all "the Navy takes care of its own!" I hoped at least maybe the hours would be easier.



The first sight that stood out as we entered Subic Bay was the aft half of the USS *Frank E. Evans* (DD-754). Cut in half in collision with HMAS *Melbourne* off Luzon 3 June 1969. The forward part sank in about three minutes taking 74 men with it. The part I saw (left) was sunk as target in Subic Bay on 10 October 1969, about a week after I saw it.

Subic Bay Naval Station had a great Enlisted Men's club. Michelob beer was 20¢ a bottle and there was a 1940's type big band. It all that reminded me of the movie "*They Were Expendable*." I expected someone to come running in at any moment saying "The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor!" I lost five or six dollars in the club's nickel slot machines. Great as all this seemed, I already couldn't wait to get back to the U.S. of A. for a whole year in February 1970. On the bright side, I had a few friends and everyone was generally patient with me.

Routine fire missions on the gun-line off Vietnam were handled by the duty watch section. Therefore it was possible to be off duty and trying to get some sleep while a fire mission was in progress. My bunk was right over the engine room. It was shake, rattle, and roll time whenever the ship was doing 20 knots or better. When we were firing the guns, the *Hanson* was usually stationary or making one or two knots, but the bulkheads rattled, chips of paint flew everywhere and the din was terrific. Yet I was so exhausted I managed quite often to sleep through it all.

I remember one night we were blazing away at "enemy troops in open." The voice of our spotter ashore kept saying, "Great shooting, keep it up, up 50 (yards) fire for effect!" I asked our navigator if we were shooting so well, how come they kept telling us to adjust our fire? His

quaint and rather obvious answer, which I shall never forget, was, “If someone was shooting 5-inch shells at you, would you stand still?”[7]

2 October 1969 -- Things turned rotten as I was assigned to “mess cooking” now for three months. This was the Navy's version of KP and I disliked it to say the least. When my turn came up I had to move forward and lost my locker.

We hit rough weather yesterday I was seasick. Up came my lunch. But I’ve been all right ever since.

Mess cooking with no end in sight made me bitter as it seemed like the three months could be extended at will. I’m vowed to transfer off the *Hanson* (“tub” was my word when I wrote home) the first chance I got, resolving to volunteer for submarines or six months in Little America, Antarctica - anything but mess cooking.

October 3, 1969 -- When I enlisted in the U.S. Navy in March 1969, the Salvation Army gave us a small bag of sundries and a Gideon's New Testament and Psalms. The Navy took away everything but the NT. On that day, on the fore-part of the USS *Hanson* (DD-832), starboard side just aft of the forward gun mount, off Vietnam coast, I experienced the loneliest, most miserable point of my life. The circumstances had something to do with the situation described above, and there I was sitting on the main deck with that New Testament. I read, prayed and signed the "sinner's prayer" on the back inside cover. Nothing seemed to happen, except that I immediately felt hopeful. However, I quickly forgot the contract I had signed with God. In truth, I more than forgot, I become a scoffer and scorner.[8]

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[7] I thought this exchange rather amusing and some years (about 20 in fact) submitted it to Reader's Digest for their "Humor in Uniform" section. They didn't seem to be as amused by it as I was – apparently humor in uniform never happens in combat.

[8] God did not forget our covenant, however, and on June 3, 1994, during my stepdaughter's high school graduation ceremony from Montrose Christian School, the Lord reminded me of our bargain. The guest speaker was evangelist Tim Lee and I had the feeling he had been sent to speak to me personally. I was the only one of the hundreds there who went up to speak with him after the ceremony, so perhaps he was.

October 4 1969 *-- There were no words equal to the situation. We were in a typhoon and the ship was constantly rolling and pitching. Everything and everyone flew from corner to corner - I felt seasick once in awhile I'm afraid.*

I was given another locker – finally a place of my own.

We had to clean out potato bins yesterday. Is it disgusting! They are all putrefied and there were a million maggots in them.

We are taking water forward and to top it off we were told the plane with our mail crashed at sea. I remember someone said there were no survivors. Scarcely a month before I had flown out to the Hancock in that same type of aircraft (maybe that particular one). The news reminded me of the chief that never flown in one of those things sober.

The potato bins were metal lockers amidships, on either side of the ASROC launcher, on the 0-1 level or one deck above the main deck. Cleaning them involved shoveling the disgusting white, rotting muck into plastic bags. I was told to throw one of them overboard.

I complied with this order by picking up the bag of offal and twirling it over my head. During the rearward (i.e. inboard) swing of one rotation I felt the bag grew suddenly very much lighter. Microseconds after I noticed this, the air was rent by an explosion of salty nautical jargon. Many of the sea oaths included adjectives, verbs, adverbs, etc. that sounded like "yuck."

The source of these nautical expletives was a cook named Gagnon who received the contents of the burst bag full in the face and chest. I think he would have killed me except he was too busy gasping for air.[9]

October 6 1969 *-- Well I've adjusted to the feeling of a destroyer in a typhoon and have conquered seasickness. The bow rises completely out of the water and you can hear it crash down again. Now that I'm quartered forward it is exceptionally loud.*

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[9] Some months later we test fired an ASROC. The ASROC or antisubmarine rocket was a rocket-propelled torpedo. After being carried well away from the ship the torpedo detached from the rocket booster and parachuted into the sea. It then used sonar to locate and hopefully hit the offending submarine. The back-blast of the rocket booster enveloped one of the potato lockers and baked the entire contents. I don't recall that we had baked potatoes that night, but I wouldn't be surprised if we did.

Had to stay up late last night bailing out milk. All our milk (many five-gallon containers of it) broke open and flooded a storage hold. Bah, milk and potatoes I shall never eat again (I quickly recanted this rash vow).

9 October 1969 *-- We've shelled VC, almost been rammed by a tanker, gone thru a typhoon, the works. Right now, for the month of October, I'm putting in time on the mess decks. I hate it. I'll be glad to get back to my regular duties. This ship is old and tired. Over 27 knots it threatens to shake to pieces.*

16 October 1969 *-- I'm working in the CPO's mess now. Serving their food, cleaning, etc. They are like a bunch of spoiled 'special-needs' kids. Since they're only enlisted men like us they really aren't entitled to have crewmembers serve their every whim. So every payday they slip us a few dollars. They also yell and scream but it's mostly all bluff.*

One of the guys sentenced to the mess decks like me refused to go. They said he must so he jumped overboard. That was extreme to say the least. He was recovered now the worst for wear as he made his leap on a warm sunny day, and was placed under guard. He went before the CO the next morning to receive "non-judicial punishment." I don't remember what sentence he received.

I went walking around Sasebo. Once you get away from the bars it's just like a U.S. city except for the signs. I don't think much of Japanese beer. So much of it's made with rice. It costs 180 yen if no carriers are in port; 300 yen if one or more are present. 3.6 yen is 1¢. All of us get bamboozled out of varying amounts. Most by bar girls, taxi drivers and shoe shine boys. The part of Sasebo called Sailor Town is really something else. You never knew more people with more ways to make money. We'll be in and out of Japan thru October and November. I'll see if I can send you all something.

October 19, 1969 *-- We had two Russian bombers try to fly over us. One was intercepted by aircraft from the USS Constellation, the other turned away when 53 miles from us. They were detected at a range of 123 miles.*

I'm eating better these days. We are always stealing cupcakes, apples, and junk out of the refrigerators. I managed to get off that CPO mess cook bit, thank God. It's more fun on the mess decks. I have 1246 days left in the USN.

October 22, 1969 - *We crossed the 38th parallel into N. Korea yesterday about 30 miles off the coast. We all got the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal as soon as we did. I've gotten two medals and I've only been aboard five weeks. They finally gave me a battle station. I keep the ships log. Today at GQ we were taking 1100 gallons of water a minute and finally had to abandon ship (this was a drill of course). Right in the middle of the mock crisis a real Russian long range patrol bomber flew over. Really fun. We'll be back in the US of A in 112 days.*

October 25, 1969 - *Got a letter from my father that made me feel good to read it. I don't know about public opinion but let's face it, we are at war, and I just didn't feel right drifting around home while many of the guys I knew went into the service.*

Don't worry about me. I've got a lot of friends and am a fair QM and a great mess cook. I've put in for my 3rd class courses, next week I take a leadership test and I might make QM3 in February or June at the latest.

A Russian destroyer followed our Task Force for several days. They want to see how we refuel at sea from carriers. So we refuel at night and they don't see a thing. I must admit that Russian ship was beautiful. Brand new, sleek, and fast. It had guided missiles and everything.

October 31, 1969, *Sasebo, Japan, We're back in Sasebo again (3rd time) and not a day too soon. We ran out of toilet paper at sea. Naturally, the table napkins started going next.*

I've only gotten one other ribbon, Viet Nam service, I sure have seen a hunk of the world though and will see more before we're home again.

Nov. 9, 1969 – *In scenic Beppu (pronounced Bay-poo) Japan. We're here for three days rest. No Navy ships ever stop here so we're regarded with awe and are asked for autographs, have we been to Viet Nam, etc.*

Today I went to a 46-foot statue of Buddha built in 1927 by a Japanese millionaire. It has got tunnels, shrines, and the like. I hope the photo I took of it comes out.

I also went to Monkey Mountain. It's a park full of giant free roaming monkeys. I bought some peanuts to feed them. I gave one to a giant monkey (King Kong) I think who badgered, threatened, and cajoled till gave him the rest. No joke, he was going to attack me unless I came across with the goods.

Nov 14, 1969 --*It was quite a day today. First we had a man either jump, get pushed, or fall overboard. Nobody knows which. He was always picked on and didn't have any friends. It's sad because everybody used to make jokes about him and quite literally persecute him. Personally I feel about 4 people on this ship drove him over just as surely as if he had been pushed.*

We had a fire also. It knocked out our power and sent us flying to GQ stations. I actually enjoyed it. For 20 minutes I was a sailor in the USN with an important job, a position of responsibility instead of a forlorn seagoing busboy

The "man" referred to above was probably 20 or 21 years old. His absence was noted about 0215 and the ship went to GQ for and all hands muster and a search of the ship. No one else was missing nor was the victim found aboard. This incident happened in the Sea of Japan on an extremely cold night. Survival time in the water was measured in minutes.

He was intelligent, as I recall, and the ways in which he was treated was a typical of the mixing of bright young men, some with college, with other men who might in 20 years in the Navy hope to rise to petty officer 1st class. They dealt with underlings whose intelligence was superior to theirs by threatening, bullying, and inflicting such punishment as was in the power. I was so exhausted at the time I remember (to my shame now) that I was mad at whomever was missing because I had to get up.

Nov. 21 1969 -- *I'm off mess cooking. two of our five QMs (including me) jumped ship in Japan. Now there are only 3 left. So I'm suddenly in demand. I got a real shock today. First I moved into OAN's compartment where I was supposed to be all along. Next I was in the chartroom fooling around with some equipment when the executive officer looked in and said "got the hang of it, Tracey?" I didn't even know he knew I was part of the crew let alone my name!*

This is a great ship. We were only in port 3 hours to refuel and 6 men took off. Three have been declared deserters. I sure miss you all. You'll have to send some pictures or something.

It's great to be a QM again; I love it (at least compared to being a scullery dogsbody). The Hanson's score since leaving San Diego August 2, 1969 was AWOL – 9, Deserters –3, men overboard – 2 (1 of whom was lost), but on the credit side we had 1 caught trying to steal a gun to shoot an officer.

ISN'T THE WATER SUPPOSED TO BE OUTSIDE THE SHIP?

The impromptu and highly unauthorized vacations of our first class QM and recently promoted third class QM had two beneficial affects for me. First was escape from the mess decks and the tender mentoring of Boatswains Mate Second Class Eldon Hull, in whose eyes anybody with more than a third grade education was suspect. The second was being moved to the OAN division-berthing compartment, in which two recent vacancies had just been created by the unauthorized and completely impromptu departure of 40 percent of the ship's QMs.

This comfy (by obsolescent destroyer standards) compartment was on the main deck just behind the forward twin 5-inch gun mount. When the ship was originally built, a second twin gun mount was sited directly above this space, and were we now resided was then machinery to turn the mount and hoist shells from the magazine. During *Hanson's* FRAM conversion, the gun mount was removed and the space below made into crew's quarters. There were 12 bunks and lockers in there. If we had been hardened convicts in prison, probably 8 of us would have been released because the cramp quarters would be construed as a violation of our basic rights. Since we were just enlisted men in the service of the United States, the only regret the Navy had was that it was physically impossible to cram more of us in the available space.

One night, during heavy weather, I awoke at about 0300 or so. A gentle sloshing sound was audible and though I was dead tied, my curiosity was aroused. I switched on my small overhead light and saw that the deck was covered by about an inch of water. As the ship rose up on each new wave, the water ran aft (toward me), sloshed against the bulkhead (wall to the non-nautical folks) and then rushed forwarded as the bow plunged down again. Among the debris

drifting on the water was one of my boon dockers and it went forward and backward as the water willed.

I told you I was dead tired. I was really dog-boned, semi-conscious, in-the-depths-of-despair, don't-care-anymore, dead tired. I though it worrisome that water was in a main deck compartment, and thought, "Isn't the water supposed to be outside the ship?" but decided if we were sinking, it was too late to do anything about it now. I switched off my light and went back to sleep.

Nov 22 1969 -- *Had another fire today. Nothing serious, but enough to provide entertainment. Last night they lost steam pressure and all the electrical gear, radar, radio, steering went out.*

Nov. 24 1969, *Yankee Station -- We're back in the good old Tonkin Gulf. Plane guarding for a carrier takes all of our time. It's dull. Weather here is rotten and it's getting worse.*

It takes us about 14 days to get to San Diego (if we can find it).

Arriving in Subic Bay between Dec. 10-14. We have to pull in because we are falling apart.

I'll be standing quartermaster of the watch alone in a day or two. I'm scared to death. I shall prevail however.

I'm going to end here. We spent all day trying to refuel from the USS Hancock, two near collisions, and I got a watch soon.

Nov 26 1969 - *We had a seam split yesterday. Not much leakage. Then a stack cracked, gases & fumes all over the bridge, ugh! This ship is slowly falling apart bit-by-bit. But as long as it gets us to San Diego I couldn't care less.*

Nov 27, 1969 -- *I've got a roll of film off to Kodak today being processed. It is a 20-shot roll with shots of monkeys, The Beppu Buddha and about twelve shots of the USS Guadeloupe refueling us.*

Its been two days without a man overboard, a fire, or a leak. Guess I'll sleep without a life jacket tonight. Take care.

November 30, 1969 -- *We pull into Hong Kong on the 2nd. I've got over $460 in cash and money orders.*

I plotted our course from Yankee Station to a point to turn toward Hong Kong. My course was 10 miles south of the one the leading QM plotted and mine turned out to be right. Was I surprised!

I like being a QM. Since two of 5 deserted, I had to learn right quick.

The ship mailed families a Hansongram, and brother, is it ever an expurgated version of what goes on here. I wrote and said a few days ago that nothing had gone wrong in two days. As soon as I mailed that or rather the morning after, the gyrocompass broke down, the radar conked out & we sprang another leak.

Sunday Dec 7, 1969 -- *Had a dress blue uniform made here, $30.00, doeskin wool, permanent creases, "liberty" cuffs, etc.*

December 10, 1969, Subic Bay, -- *We're in dry dock now. So far there are eight known cracks in the hull. We took a 48˚ roll coming in here. I was on the starboard bridge wing and I swear I thought it was the end. We just hung there for about 15 seconds. The water was over the main deck all along the starboard side. That is as close as I wish to come to being in a shipwreck.*

I sure miss Hong Kong. It's got to be our best liberty yet.

Oh yeah, I nearly forgot. We nearly collided with another tin can yesterday while we were pulling in. Our leading QM said he hoped I knew what was going on (I was keeping the log) because I would be the guest of honor along with the Captain at the inquest. Actually when the collision alarm went, I just faced the other way and braced myself.

I'd pray for peace except I need the combat pay.

Just after 0700 on an overcast morning we were entering Subic Bay. I was talking to the boatswains mate of the watch when the ship slowly rolled to starboard. A little gentle rolling was not unusual, but this time we just keep going. My conversation partner scrambled through the bridge wing door and was gone while I stood with my back against the side of the pilothouse, reached behind me with both hands, and grabbed something.

The starboard edge of the main deck amidships actually had water lapping over it. My line of sight was parallel with the deck and it seemed I was looking almost straight into the water.

Then, slowly, the ship righted herself. That this top-heavy old ship might actually have capsized never occurred to me until later. As THE ROLL was happening, I was just amazed.

13 Dec 1969, Dry dock, Subic bay, PI, -- *They brought a Christmas tree aboard, I can smell pine even as I write this, but Christmas at sea and away from family and friends you've known for years is really no Christmas at all. Besides, I'm too grown up for it all now. Its a little kid's holiday.*

Sometimes youth can be both mature and idiotic!

I am going to receive a letter of commendation from COMSEVENTH FLEET, that is all the QMs who didn't go over the hill will receive letters for the job we did while being so undermanned. We are supposed to have a Chief or first, a second, two thirds & a striker. We have a second & three strikers.

Please tell Aunt Helen thanks for her card & letter. I'll answer as soon as I get more stamps or go to a combat zone.

I hope that stereo tape recorder shows up soon. I think Nancy, Kerry, & Carla will enjoy it.

I'm going you send earphones & tapes next time we're in Subic in about a month.

Thanks for being so motherly and I appreciate the fact you all are concerned about me. It takes the Navy to really make you appreciate home & the U.S. of A.

If being out here is really helping to safeguard all of that & all of you then it is worth it.

Hopefully,

December 17, 1969 --*We have a new division officer, Ens. Coxe. He went to Annapolis and is familiar with Hyattsville. He shared my candy bars (got all the Clark bars) and is generally I guess what you might call a friend of mine.*

The weather is quite a bit better at least as regards the condition of the sea. We're back in the good old Tonkin Gulf off N. Vietnam.

Dec 19, 1969 -- *Back again, there's not much to say, one day is pretty much like another over here. Thanks for the books & magazines, I enjoy those a lot. I'll phone you from Subic Bay on Jan 22 & California on February 12. I seem to be getting along fine so far. Nine months in on Sunday. About 3/4 of the crew gets off before the next cruise. I'll be a veteran! Guess that's all for now.*

Dec 23, 1969 in the Tonkin Gulf -- *We are off N. Viet Nam at the current time. We've investigated suspicious trawlers and are in danger of possible PT attack, possible but I'm afraid not likely.*

I have a chance for 3rd class in February. I'd rather like that. At any rate its back to the U.S. of A. in January for arrival in Feb.

You wouldn't believe this ship. I'm off mess cooking because our leading QM & a QM3 went AWOL in Sasebo. All of a sudden QMs (3 left aboard counting me) were back in demand. We just got out of dry dock, 2 leaks, and 8 cracks in the hull. In spite of this we've made every one of our assignments & stood by for some other ships. We played chicken with a Russian trawler two nights ago. It kept cutting across our bow as close as 200 feet. The captain wanted to ram, told the OOD something like "If we hit that SOB, make sure we hit him amidships because I want the bastard to sink!" Some fun.

3 Jan. 1970 -- *We are about 5 miles south of the DMZ and about two miles off shore. We've fired about 500 rounds since New Years. Every night you can see tracers and flares.*

Daylight is pretty much a time of rest for everybody. So far we haven't been fired upon and it's not likely we will be. I guess everybody's prayers must be helping.

7 Jan 1970 (on the back of HANSONGRAM 1-70)

Not much time, just a note to say hello. Mail service stinks and I'm on duty 8-hours and off 8-hours, all I do is eat, sleep, and stand watches.

January 9, 1970 -- *Not much going on. I got $68.78 today back travel pay. I thought I might take up cigar smoking so I bought a pack of 5. In a week I smoked half of one and have decided to chuck the rest over the fantail.*

So far as I know we have killed 23 North Vietnamese, sunk a boat, blown up a truck and probably a lot more.

I was on the helm a few days ago during GQ They fired the forward guns and the concussion shattered the glass on the gryo compass, knocked a voice pipe down, and generally shook things up. We have a 5' rip in the deck from the concussion of our own guns.

We won't leave for the U.S. for at least a year. As soon as I make third class I'm going to re-enlist for four years (Note: I came to my senses and didn't do it!). *What will happen is I'll spend a total of six years in with 2-shore duty, anywhere I want. Oh well, time to go to work. See ya soon I hope.*

Don

14 Jan 1970 --*We've fired over 2800 rounds (of 5" ammunition) this week. There's a five-foot crack in the deck from the constant firing. Last night, muzzle blast ripped off a hatch cover. I'd seriously suspect this ship hasn't got more than a year or so left in it.* (A bad prediction. As of 2002 it was still in service in the Taiwanese Navy, although the Spaniards refused to accept her in 1973). *No joke its really in bad shape.*

It's interesting over here at times. Tracers are always flying at night and flares are everywhere. So far we've killed about 40 North Vietnamese Army soldiers, sunk a junk, and knocked out a mortar by shooting a hill out from under it.

We are arriving in the U.S. in 30 days. If all goes well, I'll see you in about 6 weeks.

14 Jan 1970 -- *Received the food package yesterday or there about. I especially liked the canned chocolate pudding and the Vienna sausage.*

This drifting around the ocean or rather off the coast is a bore and I'll be glad to leave it.

Thanks for the Reader's Digests, books, etc. Guess that's all for now. I'll probably call from Subic before you get this.

Feb 3 1970 (on the back of HANSONGRAM 2-70) -- *Got leave on arrival. Don't know if I'll beat this home or not but I'll sure try.*

Part 3 - Life in San Diego and Liberation

April 30 1970 -- *It looks like I'm stuck on the Hanson. It's been almost 2 months with no word.*

I get 2 weeks leave about mid August. I see you then.

Only 2 years, 10 months and 21 days to go without a cut until I get separated.

San Diego is a rotten place. I'd rather be overseas than here. We went to sea for four days. Caught fire at the ammo piers, you never saw so many yardbirds run so fast in so many directions, and then No. 4 boiler came within a pound of pressure of blowing up and taking the amidships section of the ship with it. See you soon I hope.

May 8, 1970 - *I went up to Disneyland again last Saturday. It wasn't quite like the first time but still I had quite a good time. Bought a Timex self-winding waterproof etc. watch while I was there. My old watch had a leak and the crystal kept fogging up. I was walking by the Timex store on "Main Street" and mostly on impulse bought a new watch. I am thoroughly convinced no matter how badly people malign Timex's as cheap and what not they are the best watches made.*

I'm going up for QM3 in August. No word about the swap. I guess I'm just doomed or perhaps fated is a better word to stay on the Hanson. Oh well, WestPac isn't so bad really, it's

the United States west of the Mississippi I find intolerable. Don't worry about me; I'm doing fine, hope to see you all soon one way or another.

The papers say the U of Md. is having its troubles. Looks like I should have stayed in school to go to war.

Conclusion

If I had given up on the swap, the swapper hadn't. He went to his congressman. In June 1970, I was informed the exchange of duty was approved if I paid my own transportation costs. I agreed to, and was off via Continental Airlines first coast-to-coast flight; really, their inaugural coast-to-coast flight from San Diego to Frankfort KY to Washington D.C. After the one stop in Frankfort, I was the sole object of attention of five stewardesses. I spend a few hours at home and caught a plane for Jacksonville FL. In nearby Mayport, I reported aboard the USS *Sarsfield* (DD-837) the evening before she departed for eight weeks of refresher training at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. I took the examination for third class petty officer in August and was advanced in the first increment in November 1970.

In January 1971, *Sarsfield* again deployed to the Middle East, entering the Indian Ocean in February. By 29 June, she was back at Mayport and resumed normal operations for the rest of 1971 and for the first three months of 1972. I was detached from the *Sarsfield* in February 1972 as a petty officer second class and reported to pre-commissioning school for training and then service aboard the USS *Donald B. Beary* (DE-1085).

Today a *Hanson* web page *http://www.usshanson.org* urges "keep her memory alive." She was once definitely alive in mine but has now faded into the shadows of times long ago.

U.S.S. SARSFIELD (DD-837)
CARE OF FLEET POST OFFICE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 09501

DD837/DEM/lw
1500
15 June 1970

From: Navigator, USS SARSFIELD (DD-837)
To: QM2 William J. PARKER, USN, B42 55 29
QM3 Thomas J. MORRISSEY, USN, B11 95 48
QM3 Mark A. KRAVONTKA, USN, B13 70 43
QM3 Michael L. LOIBL, USN, B41 87 03
→ QMSN Donald R. TRACY, USN, B22 58 28

Subj: Helmsman$ qualification of

Ref: (a) Navy Regulations, Art. 0929
(b) SARSFIELDINST 5400.1C, Art. 1305

1. You are hereby qualified to stand watch as Helmsman for Special Sea and Anchor Details on USS SARSFIELD.

2. A copy of this letter will be placed in your service record in accordance with references (a) and (b).

David E. Morgan

DAVID E. MORGAN, LCDR, USN

Figure 3 ***Post-Hanson I qualified to drive a Gearing class destroyer, even if they did spell my name wrong in the acknowledgment.***

The Floating Christmas Tree

Roger Chagnon

I was assigned to the USS *Hanson*, DD-832, immediately following my graduation from Signalman A school in Newport, Rhode Island, in September of 1969. The *Hanson* was performing Plane Guard duties attached to the USS *Hancock* CVA-19 on Yankee Station off Vietnam at the time that I arrived on board. The signal gang was standing two section watches then and I, as a Signalman Seamen Apprentice, was placed in a watch section with Signalman Second Class Watson, and Signalman seaman Schiffner. The commanding officer was Captain Fleeson.

Plane guard duty during flight operations was a busy time for the signal gang as the carrier would relay her intentions for speed and directional changes to the plane guard destroyer detail via flashing light with execution happening very quickly. Flight operations would occur night and day, in any weather. The only breaks in the action would be UNREPS for a drink of NSFO (*navy standard fuel oil*) and JP5 (*aviation fuel*) from an oiler, or, occasionally from the carrier, and for stores and ammunition from the supply ships. The JP5 was taken aboard for several uses: Thinner for paint and cleaner for paint brushes, fuel for the auxiliary diesel generators, and fuel for the occasional UNREP of a HELO in trouble on her way home.

Our assignment as a Plane Guard destroyer was periodically broken by rotation as a Naval Gunfire Support unit to provide H and I and troop support fire. Therein lies fuel for letters for another day.

On Christmas Eve 1969 I was standing the Mid-watch from 23:30 to 0700. We were on stand-down this night with no flight ops scheduled, so the *Hanson* was steaming at 10 knots approximately 1000 yards astern of the *Hancock* just to port of her wake. The other plane guard destroyer was about 1000 yards astern of us on the starboard side of the carriers wake. I have forgotten the name of the other destroyer.

One of the nice things about duty on Yankee Station was that the weather was warm, although quite moist during monsoon season. This night was simply beautiful with a light breeze and a sea devoid of waves with the exception of light swells. I, as junior watch section member,

was required to keep a constant visual watch on the carrier in case she should call on flashing light.

The other two watch section members, Watson and Schiffner, were in the signal shack relaxing. I was standing on the starboard wing of the signal bridge, directly over the starboard bridge wing, and was carrying on a light conversation with the Junior Officer of the Deck, ENS. MacDonald. I glanced up at the carrier and noticed something in the water near her stern. The object seemed to have some sort of lights on it! I directed the attention of the starboard bridge watch and ENS MacDonald to the object and then ran to take a look through the "Big Eyes." By now the object was about 500 yards astern of the *Hancock* and the same distance ahead of the *Hanson*.

To my absolute astonishment I saw that it was a small Christmas tree complete with battery powered lights attached to some sort of float. I called to Watson and Schiffner and they came out to see what the fuss was all about. We stood there without words as the Christmas tree passed down the starboard side about 300 yards away. I was going to call the other destroyer on the light and then thought... they will see it just as I had. I have no idea who built that tree and set it on its mission of joy that night, but I was grateful to them for having cheered me up on my first Christmas away from home!

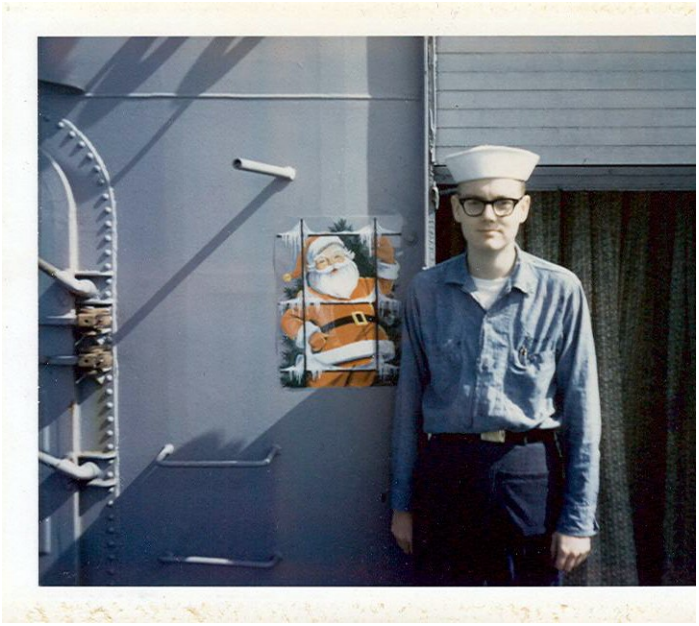
Roger G. Chagnon, Jr. Westfield, NY

Don Tracey's father in 1943

Don Tracey, 1969

June 3, 1969

Hong Kong Victoria Peak, December 1969



Gulf of Tonkin, December 1969

Don Tracey in Bahrain